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ABSTRACT

Little information exists to provide an accurate portrait of education in small rural schools, including staff development practices and needs in such schools. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory conducted a review of literature and a survey of rural educators in the Southwest concerning staff development in their schools. The survey represented an initial effort to describe the staff development activities that existed in rural small schools and the staff development activities that educators working at these schools actually preferred. A sample was drawn from Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, for survey purposes, and structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers. Results of the survey indicated that 80% of the respondents regularly participate in multiple staff development activities during the school year. The most frequent activities consist of one-shot lectures given by consultants from outside the district with little follow-up provided for the participants. The data also suggest that staff development activities are not typically planned and initiated at the local level, but from the top down, perhaps reflecting the fact that staff development is not based on local needs. While the data suggest strong tendencies towards episodic staff development, there are also signs of an emerging locally driven system as well. Topics covered were wide-ranging, from the basic to the controversial. The topics considered most relevant were those that offer immediately useful materials, or specific, directly applicable skills. Survey information is presented in 12 data tables. This document contains 31 references and a copy of the Staff Development Questionnaire. (ALL)

ED309000

Staff Development in Rural, Small Schools: A View from Rural Educators in the Southwest

by
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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

What We Know About Schooling and
Staff Development in Rural, Small Schools 2

- Schooling in Rural, Small Schools 2
- Staff Development in Rural, Small Schools 6

A Framework for Focusing on Staff Development 8

A Regional View of Staff Development
by Rural Educators in the Southwest 12

- Design and Purpose of the Survey 12
- Sampling Plan 13
- Characteristics of the Survey Sample 15
- Supplemental Interviews 16
- Regional Results 17
  - The Delivery of Staff Development Activities 18
  - The Content of Staff Development Activities 22
  - Local Educators' Preferences for Staff Development 29
  - Differences Between Principals and Teachers 40
- Conclusions 43

References 44

Appendix A: Staff Development Questionnaire

Staff Development in Rural, Small Schools: A View from Rural Educators in the Southwest

The folk adage, "What goes around, comes around" may be applied to many educational movements—none more so than rural education. Public schooling in America began as a rural system. Even in the 1980s, a majority of schools exist in rural areas (DeYoung, 1987) and/or enroll fewer than 1,000 students (Parks, 1980). A quarter of all U.S. public school systems enroll fewer than 300 students (Barker, 1987).

Yet educational research and reforms throughout most of this century have focused not on "rural" and "small" but on "urban" and "large." As DeYoung (1987) points out, "The development of American education as a whole was built on the assumption that schools of the future would and should continue to become larger, more efficient, and more vocationally relevant" (p. 127). Rural and small schools, for the most part, were perceived as mere vestiges of an outdated and disappearing system. Consolidation and annexation became the prescriptions of choice. In the state of Oklahoma alone, for example, the number of school districts was reduced from 4,450 to 613 over a 40-year period (Dale & McKinley, 1986).

...little empirical information exists to provide an accurate portrait of education in rural, small schools...

Within the past decade, however, the educational community has begun to examine more closely its assumptions about rural education. The work of a small number of dedicated researchers and practitioners, the intensity and persistence of community opposition to consolidation, and the emergence of the research literature on effective schools, all have led to renewed interest in the circumstances—and strengths—of rural, small schools.

Later sections of this report will illustrate that little empirical information exists to provide an accurate portrait of education in rural, small schools—including staff development practices and needs in such schools. As an organization dedicated to educational improvement in the southwestern United States, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) hopes this report, focused on staff development in the rural, small schools of the Southwest, will help to fill in at least a portion of the canvas.

What We Know about Schooling and Staff Development in Rural, Small Schools

As a context for the presentation of SEDL's findings concerning the regional view of staff development by rural educators in the Southwest, this report begins with a brief overview of what is currently known about both schooling and staff development in rural, small schools.

Schooling in Rural, Small Schools

The recent literature on rural, small schools offers few consistent insights as to the characteristics and processes of rural education. As Sher (1983, p. 259) has noted, "One can find evidence to support nearly any characterization" of rural, small schools—positive or negative, underachieving or at the forefront of educational improvement. The literature includes contradictory findings on a whole range of topics related to rural schooling, including:

- optimum school size (see, for example, Barker, 1987; DeYoung, 1987),
- school effectiveness (Beckner, 1987; Talbert, Fletcher, & Phelps, 1987),
- student achievement (Monk & Haller, 1986; Newton, 1987; Sher, 1983; United States Department of Agriculture, 1987),
- the characteristics and qualifications of teachers (Traugh, 1984; Wood & Kleine, 1987),
- teacher isolation and opportunities for professional development (National Education Association, 1987; Newton, 1987),
- staff turnover (Barker, 1985; Muse, 1984; NEA, 1987),
- communication and cooperation among teachers and administrators (Barker, 1987; Talbert, Fletcher, & Phelps, 1987), and
- levels of parent and community involvement and support (Barker, 1987; Herriott, 1980; Monk & Haller, 1986; Talbert, Fletcher, & Phelps, 1987).

Three factors seem to account for this host of contradictions. First is a lack of research data, the result of decades of focus on urban education. Second is the existence of what Monk & Haller (1986, p. 9) call "the folklore of rural education": an array of ideas about "what is right and what is wrong" with rural, small schools, ideas "commonly assumed to be correct without critical examination."

Finally, rural, small schools are incredibly diverse—in their size, their degree of isolation from other towns and cities, their resources, their community contexts, and the populations they serve. In SEDL's five-state region alone, for example, there are one-room schools and rural districts that serve more than 2,000 students. Demonstration sites participating in SEDL's Rural, Small Schools Initiative include:

- an Oklahoma school district whose student population is 85 percent Cherokee; schools whose enrollments include a high percentage of blacks (in Louisiana and Texas) and Hispanics (in New Mexico and Texas); and a district in the Texas Panhandle whose 72 students are all white;
- school systems whose annual per-pupil expenditures range from a low of $1,760 to a high of over $10,000;
- a rural parish in the Louisiana bayou country, an Apache reservation school in New Mexico, and a "bedroom community" located only 20 minutes from the metropolitan area of Midland-Odessa, Texas.

...most rural, small schools do share some basic characteristics that have implications for staff development...

Such diversity would seem to argue that, as Hobbs (1987) puts it, "Talk about rural America in general is not very productive; local circumstances and opportunities vary too greatly" (p. 8). Rural school systems vary significantly in their ability to recruit and retain staff; the resources they can devote to salaries, materials, staff development, and school improvement; their access to information and support; the range of courses and curricula they can offer; and the needs of their students. However, most rural, small schools do share some basic characteristics that have implications for staff development and other educational improvement efforts.

Rural, small schools have a greater tendency to be resource-bound than do larger districts. As a group, rural schools tend to have a narrower tax base than larger districts, and to be

highly susceptible to ups and downs within the local economy. Rural economies in turn are in trouble; Hobbs (1987) reports that "in general, rural communities have lower per capita income, higher poverty rates, higher dependency rates and lower labor force participation rates" (p. 27). Agricultural communities are increasingly at risk in the 1980s; farm foreclosures and declining land values are affecting property tax revenues, two-thirds of which go to schools (Richter, 1986). Many rural industrial economies are declining as well. A recent report on employment patterns in the rural South (Rosenfeld, Bergman, & Rubin, 1985) revealed that, in many states, "employment in key southern industries grew in metro counties, even as the same industry declined in nonmetro counties" (p. xi).

Rural schools generally, then, tend to have proportionately fewer resources than their urban and suburban counterparts. DeYoung (1987) also notes that "school expenditures...in many rural school districts have different patterns than in metropolitan school districts" (p. 17). He describes lower rural school expenditures for instruction and higher costs for transportation and capital outlay. Other studies describe a general inadequacy in funding for staff development and support (Muse, 1984; see also Wood & Kleine, 1987).

...studies describe a general inadequacy in funding for staff development and support...

Teachers and administrators tend to have multiple preparations, duties, and roles. Monk and Haller (1986), among others, have noted that teachers in rural, small schools "face heavy and nonspecialized teaching loads" (p. 2). Though rural school teachers may teach fewer students and deal with less bureaucratic paperwork than teachers in larger districts, they generally must teach multiple courses, subjects, and/or grades (Massey & Crosby, 1983). As a result, "the teacher is spread too thinly, has too many preparations each day, and is unable to develop specialized skills in a particular subject" (Monk & Haller, 1986, p. 30). According to a national survey of teachers by the National Education Association (1987), more small than medium or large school systems have a required school day of eight hours or longer. The survey data indicate that teachers from small districts also spend, on average, more hours each week on their teaching duties.

Principals and superintendents, too, tend to have more varied responsibilities and to lack the kinds of support staff available in larger districts—assistants, curriculum specialists and supervisors, even bookkeepers and secretaries in the smallest schools (Monk & Haller, 1986; Nachtigal, 1982). For both

teachers and administrators, then, time constraints and workloads can become significant factors in their attitudes concerning staff development or other school improvement efforts.

In rural, small schools, strengths and weaknesses among teachers and administrators tend to be magnified in their effects on school operations and on students. Sher (1983) notes that the smallest schools "tend to magnify 'normal' strengths and weaknesses" among teachers "rather than to create wholly new ones" (p. 258). Monk and Haller (1986), discussing the truism that teachers in small schools know their students better—and sometimes work with them for two years or more—echo Sher's point:

...strengths and weaknesses among teachers and administrators tend to be magnified...

> The dilemma is obvious. If teachers have greater opportunity to know their students in these small towns, they should be better able to gear their instruction to the particular pupils in their classrooms. But they also have greater opportunity to err—and there is great opportunity for those errors to be calamitous. (p. 36)

Effective leadership is perhaps even more critical in smaller than in larger districts. As with teachers, researchers note a "magnification" of impact of strengths and weaknesses among small school administrators. Because the administrative structure generally is much smaller, without a range of assistant superintendents and principals, curriculum specialists, or instructional supervisors, there are fewer "buffers" between teachers and administrators—a circumstance that can be either positive or negative, depending on the leadership qualities of the administrator. Nachtigal (1982) states:

> Small schools, unlike large systems, are relatively free of bureaucratic inertia. As a result, a good leader can create a positive climate and institute educational improvements in rather short order. Likewise, a poor superintendent can arrive on the scene and destroy a program equally as fast. (p. 10)

Rural education researchers also note that leadership in smaller school systems involves a somewhat different mix of abilities than in larger districts, with emphasis on the ability to get along within the local community: "In rural school improvement, understanding and trust of the local social structure appears to be as important as professional expertise in filling such leadership positions" (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 286).

The change process is more volatile, political, and linked to community norms than in larger districts. Perhaps the most extensive body of literature on educational processes in rural,

small schools consists of a number of case studies focused on school improvement efforts during the 1970s and early 1980s. These studies—including, among others, the Experimental Schools Project and programs initiated through the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory's Rural Education Project—all reach similar conclusions about the influence of the local community on change within schools. McLaughlin (1982), for example, states, "The success of rural school improvement programs depends on how well they fit local community needs as well as local educational needs" (p. 283). Fitzsimmons and Freedman (1981) put it even more strongly:

> We have strong evidence that community power and culture cannot be overridden by most rural schools. Projects that are not in line with community sentiments are not likely to succeed. (p. 244)

Robert Herriott (1980, p. 13) describes an ill-defined "zone of tolerance" within which communities allow schools to function freely. The case studies suggest that this zone is substantially narrower in small, rural communities than in larger urban or suburban areas, where both residents and school personnel tend to be more heterogeneous (Nachtigal, 1982; Traugh, 1984). Such findings have implications for staff development activities aimed at significant changes in current practices in rural, small schools: for the need to recognize and understand community norms, to select programs and strategies compatible with those norms, and to involve the community in change efforts—all amounting to a strong case for local initiative rather than state mandates as the locus of control in staff development programs for such schools.

...a strong case for local initiative rather than state mandates as the locus of control in staff development...

Staff Development in Rural, Small Schools

DeYoung (1987), reviewing the status of research on rural education, devotes only a single paragraph to staff development. In their survey of research related to staff development in rural, small schools, Wood and Kleine (1987) describe the literature as "sparse, spotty, and scattered" (p. 1). Moreover, the literature that does exist often is based on "folklore" rather than on empirical evidence. For example, several authors have cited the failure of college and university teacher education programs to tailor specific elements of their curriculum to the "special" needs of those who will teach in rural settings (Gardener & Edington, 1982; Massey & Crosby, 1983; Mitler, 1988). Others have described teachers in rural, small schools as isolated and limited in their opportunities for professional development (see Newton, 1987). Yet, Wood and

Kleine have pointed out that there is virtually no research data to support such characterizations; and, in fact, some studies seem to contradict such findings.

Wood and Kleine (1987) also found only a handful of studies focused on the effectiveness of specific staff development approaches in rural schools. Even these studies were too limited in either scope or methodology to allow any solid conclusions about "what works." Wood and Kleine thus conclude, "It is clear that the research literature on staff development in rural settings provides one with very little assistance about how to design professional growth programs for rural school personnel." They suggest that, until more empirically validated information becomes available, "the research on staff development in non-rural schools...may provide researchers and practitioners with more helpful hints about appropriate practice in rural school districts" (p. 11)

"...the research literature...provides one with very little assistance about how to design professional growth programs for rural school personnel."

A Framework for Focusing on Staff Development

A myriad of studies can be found that treat staff development approaches in K-12 education, although, as noted earlier, most have focused on urban settings. While the literature does present some conflicting evidence as to specific "best practices" (see, for example, Korinek, Schmid, & McAdams, 1985; Wade, 1985; Wood & Kleine, 1987), some useful generalizations can be made.

Fullan (1982) lists seven major reasons that teacher inservice activities fail to produce significant changes in classroom practice:

1. One-shot workshops are widespread but are ineffective.
2. Topics are frequently selected by people other than those for whom the in-service is intended.
3. Follow-up support for ideas and practices introduced in in-service programs occurs in only a very small minority of cases.
4. Follow-up evaluation occurs infrequently.
5. In-service programs rarely address the [participants'] needs and concerns....
6. The majority of programs involve teachers from many different schools and/or school districts, but there is no recognition of the differential impact of positive and negative factors within the systems to which they must return.
7. There is a profound lack of any conceptual basis in the planning and implementing of in-service programs that would ensure their effectiveness. (p. 263)

...staff development, like all dimensions of educational change, is a process rather than a set of isolated events.

Fullan and others (see, for example, Joyce & Showers, 1988; Lutz, 1987; Wood & Kleine, 1987) emphasize that staff development, like all dimensions of educational change, is a process rather than a set of isolated events. To be effective, researchers conclude, that process must be systematic, needs-based, participant-owned, and supported over time.

Effective staff development requires commitment from both principals and school district administrators. Joyce and Showers (1988) note that "many otherwise promising staff development efforts have faltered and even failed because insufficient attention has been paid to the development of a social organization that is congenial to change and growth" (p. 17). At least one major model of staff development (see Wood & Kleine,

1987) actually includes activities to foster such commitment as the first, or "readiness" phase of staff development.

Effective staff development also requires training that derives from locally-identified needs and goals, and that fits into a larger, long-term plan for school improvement (Fullan, 1982; Joyce & Showers, 1988; Korinek, Schmid, & McAdams, 1985). Teachers and administrators need to work collaboratively to develop staff development plans (Wood & Kleine, 1987).

Actual inservice training activities need to be carefully tailored to the needs and goals identified in school districts' staff development plans. This means considering not merely content but the scope and form of training activities. Korinek, Schmid, and McAdams (1985, p. 34) identify three major types of inservice training, labelling them information transmission, skills acquisition, and behavior change. Lutz (1987), reviewing these types, points out that "a problem exists when there is a mismatch between the goals of inservice and the type of session presented" (p. 177). If changes in teachers' classroom behavior is the goal, then information transmission—which is characterized by short lecture, panel, or demonstration sessions on self-contained topics—is not the appropriate form of inservice to be delivered.

...although much is known about effective staff development, this knowledge too rarely gets translated into practice.

Evaluation, follow-up, and support activities are also critical to staff development efforts that are geared to changes in the classroom. Such activities include evaluation and monitoring of classroom practices as well as the inservice sessions themselves; teacher observations, practice, feedback, and coaching; mutual support and information-sharing among teachers; and consultation and resource support from district and/or external experts (Fullan, 1982; Joyce & Showers, 1988; Korinek, Schmid, & McAdams, 1985; Lutz, 1987; Wood & Kleine, 1987).

Unfortunately, although much is known about effective staff development, this knowledge too rarely gets translated into practice. Fullan's list of failures, cited earlier, still seems to apply in many districts and among many external providers of staff development services. Korinek, Schmid, and McAdams (1985), for example, found that information transmission remains the type of inservice that is both "most common and unpopular with teachers" (p. 34). Wood & Kleine (1987) describe a 1984 study by McQuarrie, Wood, and Thompson in which educational practitioners and professors were surveyed regarding the use of 38 effective staff development practices:

> The findings revealed that all but three of these practices were neglected.... The practices which were most under-implemented included developing a positive school climate; collaborating in the development of school improvement goals; setting long range improvement goals; examining current practices in the school; conducting needs assessment; providing for followup assistance after training; have the principal recognize those implementing changes; ensuring adequate resources are available for implementation; using self-monitoring and student feedback to ensure maintenance, and sharing responsibility for maintenance. (pp. 27-28)

A majority of staff development activities, then, seem to follow what may be described as a "deficit" model (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978), or perhaps more accurately, an "episodic" model. Such staff development is characterized by "one-shot" sessions that focus on individual professional development and that are not linked to an integrated, locally-developed staff development plan directed at school improvement.

A majority of staff development activities, then, seem to follow...an "episodic" model.

If one characterizes the "episodic" model as one extreme of school staff development delivery processes, the other pole can be described as "systemic." In the systemic approach, staff development consists of the following: (a) training to develop instructional skills, subject matter, and leadership for individual professional development; (b) activities to support faculty training and study of improvement within the school as a whole; and (c) district (or community) initiatives to change the schooling system.

The first component is concerned with inservice activity that supports the individual teacher. Staff development activities appropriate at this level include workshops, courses, professional meetings, peer observation or coaching, and participation in study groups. The second component, is concerned with focusing staff development on change within the entire school. Participation in activities selected on this basis aims toward making the institution work as a cohesive unit. The third level is concerned with how district management supports individual, school-based efforts and integrates district initiatives with them. Joyce and Showers (1988) suggest thinking of these separate parts as the individual component, the collective component, and the systemic component. In this report, "systemic" will denote the approach to staff development that integrates these three components into a cohesive staff development system.

In contrast to the systemic model, the episodic model of staff development is generally organized around one-shot efforts

to introduce teachers to skills and materials to use within the classroom. Such episodic staff development is usually based on the assumption that teachers are deficient in information and/or skills to carry out professional activities. Such a narrow focus on improving the staffs' professional knowledge and skills is clearly an important part of any staff development program, but it encourages educational leaders to overlook the larger problem of uniting the staff to improve the entire school and district.

As Michael Fullan (1982, p. 264) emphasizes, effective staff development "is central to the entire process of change" in educational systems. It is also a complex and costly process. Korinek, Schmid, and McAdams (1985) note that the systemic model of staff development most likely to produce changes in classroom practice is also "the most costly, [the most] time consuming, and [the one that] requires the greatest commitment from all concerned" (p. 36). Yet the payoffs are substantial, in terms of teacher renewal, school climate, and—most importantly—student achievement.

...the systemic model of staff development most likely to produce changes in classroom practice is also "the most costly..."

The two frameworks just described provide a context for presenting the results of SEDL's regional survey of rural educators on staff development. While the data collected will not clearly label staff development practices in rural, small schools as either episodic or systemic, they will indicate the degree to which various dimensions of staff development activity tend to resemble either episodic or systemic approaches.

A Regional View of Staff Development by Rural Educators in the Southwest

This section of the report focuses on data obtained from SEDL's regional survey of rural educators in the Southwest concerning staff development in rural, small schools. The design and purposes of the survey are described first, followed by descriptions of the sampling plan, the characteristics of the survey respondents, the procedures followed in conducting a set of supplemental interviews, the regional results, and the conclusions drawn.

Design and Purpose of the Survey

The survey represented an initial effort to describe what staff development activity actually existed in rural, small schools and what staff development activity was preferred by educators working in these schools.

For the purposes of the survey questionnaire, staff development was broadly defined to include anything a school district (or school) did to directly assist staff to become better educators (including inservice training). The survey, a copy of which is provided in Appendix A, was designed to collect information on the general characteristics of staff development delivery in rural, small schools, providing information that would help describe components of the current delivery system and the specific content of current staff development activities in the region; the felt needs of teachers and principals for staff development; and the general attitude of rural educators towards, and preferences for, certain types of staff development. The survey represented an initial effort to describe what staff development activity actually existed in rural, small schools and what staff development activity was preferred by educators working in these schools.

Specifically, the survey contained questions focused on the following dimensions of district-provided staff development activities: (a) the frequency of respondents' participation, (b) the usual provider, (c) the types of activities typically offered, (d) the benefit generally received after participation, (e) the location where activities were usually held, (f) the type of follow-up activities generally conducted, (g) the planning usually involved in activity development, (h) the general level of community support for such activities, and (i) the average amount of time devoted to staff development. In addition, the survey sought information on rural educators' preferences for staff development delivery systems and what they did for their own professional development outside the opportunities provided by the school district.

Sampling Plan

Given SEDL's focus on local school staff development activities and the awareness that staff development efforts both influence and are influenced by teachers and administrators, SEDL drew a sample of local school personnel, selecting (approximately) equal samples from three groups: elementary teachers (grades K-6), secondary teachers (grades 7-12), and principals (elementary, middle, and secondary schools).

Initially, 1,000 individuals were randomly sampled across the region in each of these three categories. Individuals were considered for inclusion in the sample under the following criteria:

(1) They were employed at a public school;

(2) the school where they worked was located in a rural area, defined by the exclusionary criterion that the school was not located in any of the current standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSAs) defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB); and

(3) the school district associated with the school where they worked served 1600 students or fewer.

When employing this sampling procedure (conducted by Market Data Retrieval on 1987-88 data bases), sample sizes for Louisiana and New Mexico were too small (totals of 9 and 144, respectively), thereby not permitting trustworthy indices of staffs' perceptions to be obtained. To compensate, separate samples were drawn for each of these two states, randomly selecting 200 individuals per educational role category while eliminating the district size restriction. The figure of 200 individuals per each of the three categories was selected because it was expected to result in a total of 60 responses given a projected 10% return rate. As SEDL was operating under tight time constraints, a short turn-around time of two weeks was required of respondents, precluding any follow-up activities and leading to the anticipated low return rate.

Thus, while the original sample was drawn to be representative of the region (a relatively large number of selections from Oklahoma and Texas were expected, with more moderate selections from Arkansas, and few selections from New Mexico and Louisiana), the supplemented selection had the effect

of over-representing Louisiana and New Mexico (relative to the region). However, anticipating a relatively low return rate, the sampling procedure could not be expected to permit broad generalizations about staff development in the region to be made; rather, it was hoped that a sizeable number of returns would allow some relatively trustworthy descriptive data to be collected in an area where little existed.

Exhibit 1 displays the samples drawn and the respondents returning surveys by state and educational role. Of the 4,162 surveys mailed across the region, 724 were completed and returned within the stipulated time frame. The overall return rate of 17%, while still low, was higher than anticipated. A blind return procedure was used to insure anonymity; as shown in Exhibit 1, 91 surveys were returned without postmarks indicating their state origin. In addition, three surveys were returned where educational roles were not indicated.

Exhibit 1
Sample Size and Respondent Group for Each Educational Role, by State

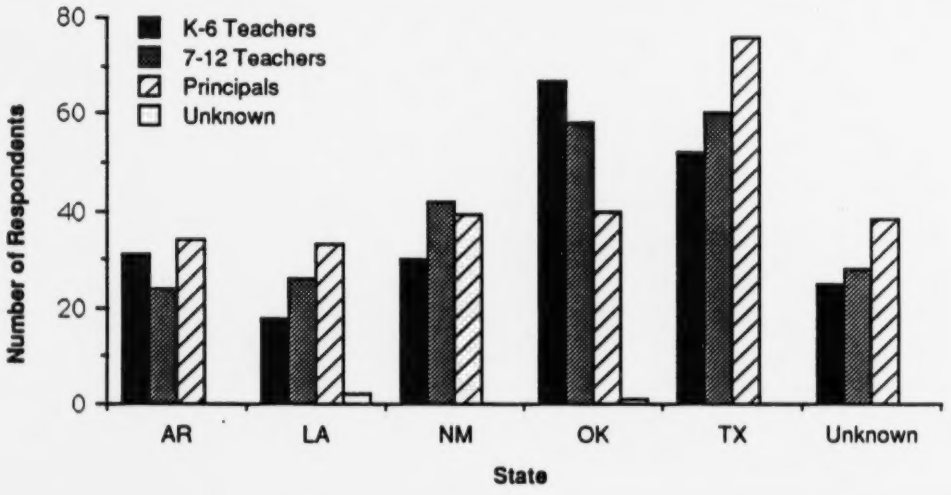
State	Number of Mailed Surveys				Number of Returned Surveys				
	Teachers				Teachers				
State	P	S	Prn	Total	P	S	Prn	U	Total
AR	204	204	204	612	31	24	34	0	89
LA	203	203	203	609	18	26	33	2	79
NM	244	243	219	706	30	42	39	0	111
OK	301	302	302	905	67	58	40	1	166
TX	444	443	443	1330	52	60	76	0	188
U	---	---	---	---	25	28	38	0	91
	1396	1395	1371	4162	223	238	260	3	724

P = Primary grades (K-6)
S = Secondary grades (7-12)
Prn = Principals (elementary and secondary)
U = Unknown

The sampling procedure resulted (as planned) in approximately equal numbers of respondents in each of the three educational role categories: elementary teachers (grades K-6) represented 31% of the respondents; secondary teachers (grades 7-12) accounted for 33%; and principals from across these grade levels constituted 36% of the group.

In Exhibit 2 the relative percentage of respondents provided by each state for each educational role category are displayed (disregarding those respondents for whom state identification could not be made). As shown, for K-6 teachers, Louisiana represented the smallest percentage of respondents, with Oklahoma providing the largest percentage. For teachers in grades 7-12, Arkansas and Louisiana contributed the lowest percentages, with Texas and Oklahoma contributing the largest. Finally, for principals, about 35% of the respondents came from Texas, with the remaining coming equally from the four other states.

Exhibit 2: Number of Respondents Within Each Educational Role for Each State



Characteristics of the Survey Sample

Before presenting the results of the survey, the characteristics of the survey sample are discussed. First, 96% of the respondent group indicated that they viewed themselves as working in rural geographical areas (thus confirming the efficacy of the sampling procedure). Further, the respondents were mostly (78%) from small schools that had enrollments of 500 or fewer students (14% enrolling fewer than 150 students, 32% enrolling between 150 and 300 students, and 32% enrolling between 300 and 500 students). Thus, there is little doubt about the rural, small school environments of these educators. Some of the small towns identified may, however, be located near major urban areas as no restrictions were placed on sampling teachers from less geographically isolated, small towns.

Second, more than half (58%) of the respondents were very experienced educators with 13 or more years of experience (9% of the respondents had three or fewer years of experience, 13% had between four and seven years experience, and 20% had between eight and 12 years experience). Third, the respondents were also highly educated: The majority (65%) had completed Master's or Doctor's degrees, and an additional 27% had completed course work beyond the level of a Bachelor's degree.

All of these factors suggest that the respondent group may not be entirely representative of the rural, small school educators in SEDL's five state region. As a whole, the group most likely tends to over-represent the more experienced and well-educated teachers and principals. It also surely tends to over-represent those educators motivated enough to fill out and return a mailed questionnaire. Exactly what sort of systematic bias this may produce is unclear. One reasonable argument is that educators that are more highly educated, experienced, and motivated represent higher levels of professionalism or professional commitment. While this could yield data that provide a more informed picture of staff development in the region, it could also lead to one that may be more positive than warranted.

...in-depth structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers from rural, small schools.

Supplemental Interviews

In order to supplement the information gathered through the regional surveys, in-depth structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers from rural, small schools, focusing on their participation in staff development over the past five years. Trained interviewers conducted the interviews, each typically lasting about 90 minutes. Rather than using tape recorders (that can intimidate some informants), interviewers took detailed notes during each interview. The interview protocols were returned to SEDL where they were coded by a trained ethnographer, who subsequently subjected them to a content analysis. The results of the analysis are not reported separately in this report, but rather are interspersed with the results of the survey analyses.

The 20 interviewed teachers (four from each of the five states served by SEDL) were purposefully selected as good sources of detailed information about their staff development experiences. The teachers selected for these interviews tended to be the more experienced, highly educated, active, and professional teachers. About 80% reported engaging in a variety of professional self-improvement activities on their own. Thus, these were teachers most likely to have participated in local

staff development activities, and therefore, to be the most knowledgeable about them. This made them excellent sources of information about what was occurring in the area of staff development in rural, small schools.

The interviewed teachers were also asked a variety of questions on rural life and schooling. Their responses indicated that they were very positive about teaching in rural, small schools—they frequently mentioned the advantages of small class enrollments, high parent participation and concern, the peacefulness of rural life, and high staff cooperation. They cited as negatives low pay, lack of materials, and a variety of unpaid extra-curricular roles. In addition, various conflicts over hirings, athletic programs, and school activities were also reported. Overall, however, the teachers interviewed seemed to represent the views of a stable, committed, and reasonably satisfied group of educators. They most likely represent what principals might label as "the good teachers" in these schools.

...the similarities in what is occurring within the region appear to be much greater than the differences between states.

Regional Results

The regional results of the survey and supplemental interviews are presented in three sections. First, data addressing current staff development delivery are described, followed by a presentation of data that address the current content of staff development. Finally, data describing the preferences of local educators' for staff development activities are presented.

No state-by-state comparisons are made in this report. While some (predictable) differences by state were found (for example, more intermediaries were identified as usual providers of staff development in states where such units were more common), overall, the respondents expressed similar perceptions of staff development across states—indeed, the similarities in what is occurring within the region appear to be much greater than the differences between states.

Before proceeding, a comment on missing data is needed. Over the entire group of 724 respondents and 50 survey questions, the number of respondents who failed to answer any given question (with one exception) ranged from 0 to 15 (with a mean of 4.7 and standard deviation of 4.6). For the one exception, which will be described in a subsequent section, 33 respondents failed to respond. Given the overall (average) non-response rate of 0.6% per question, the percentages presented in the results that

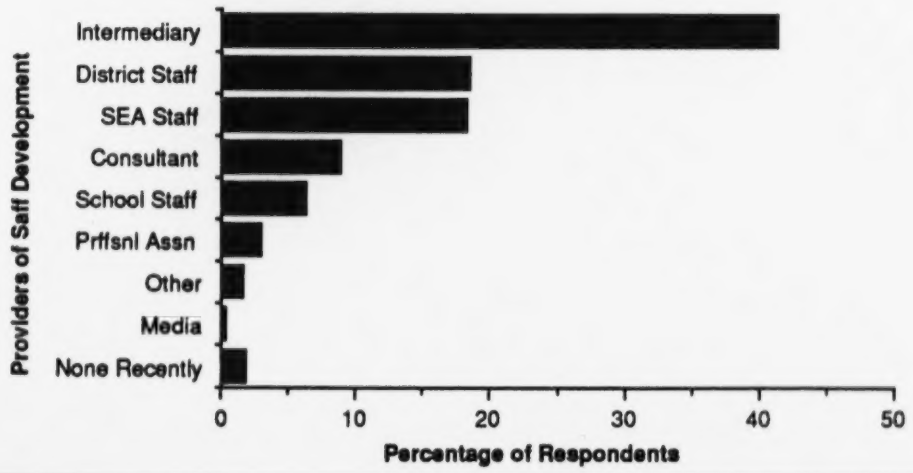
follow were computed solely on the set of valid responses, ignoring non-responses.

The delivery of staff development activities. Information was collected through the regional survey that would help characterize the general pattern (or system) of staff development delivery. This section describes the level of activity, type of leadership, and degree of local participation in both the planning and implementation of staff development activities.

Teachers and principals in SEDL's survey generally reported a considerable level of staff development activity. Virtually all respondents (98%) reported participating in some sort of school-district sponsored staff development activity during a given school year—indeed, 80% of those responding reported that they usually participated in two or more such activities during the school year.

Exhibit 3 indicates that staff development activities were provided by a number of different people and agencies. As can be seen, the great majority of staff development activity was usually conducted by individuals housed outside the local school. These were primarily individuals from intermediary units (41%), such as regional education agencies or teacher centers, with state education agency staff and local education agency staff each accounting for about 20% of the delivered activities. Local school staff were the usual providers in only 6% of all reported activity.

Exhibit 3: Usual Providers of Staff Development



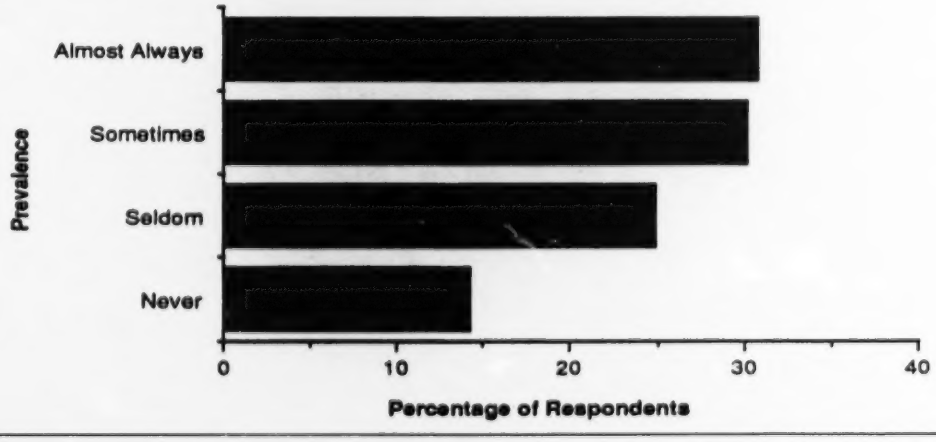
Nearly all of the school or school district sponsored staff development activity (87%) was conducted in the local schools—70% conducted in the participants' own school and 17% in a school within the participants' district. The data further indicate that the most frequent type of staff development activity was delivered in the format of one-shot lectures: Almost a third of the respondents reported that this was "almost always" what happened in their staff development activities, with 44% reporting that this "sometimes" happened.

Less than 20% of the respondents cited university coursework as a part of the staff development activities provided by their school districts. Even fewer cited computer course work (16%) or community service courses (8%).

As discussed earlier, one of the key elements of episodic staff development is that follow-up for any given activity is, at best, limited. Three-fourths of the respondents to SEDL's survey reported that the usual type of staff development activity follow-up in their experience was the completion of a questionnaire at the end of the activity. Only 25% of the respondents reported that they usually got back together at some later time to review what had been learned during the staff development activity; even fewer (9%) reported that they were subsequently observed to see if the activity had been successful in changing classroom behavior.

Moreover, the respondents generally tended to believe that schools only provided staff development that was mandated by the state. Exhibit 4 suggests how strong this perception was among rural, small school educators.

Exhibit 4: Prevalence of Staff Development based on State Mandates



It should be noted that the non-response rate to the question concerning state mandates ("The only staff development my school has is what state mandates require") was 5%, this almost ten times the average non-response rate. This may indicate that a sizeable number of respondents do not know what state mandates for staff development entail, tempering the interpretation above that staff development is largely perceived as being state-driven.

Thus far, the data reported suggest the following general description of staff development activities: More than three-fourths of the responding rural, small school educators regularly participate in multiple staff development activities during the school year. Almost all of the activities are conducted at local school buildings. The most frequent activities consist of one-shot lectures given by non-local personnel with little follow-up subsequently provided for participants. The data also suggest that staff development activities are not typically planned and initiated at the local level (at least, this is the local perception), but rather are "top-down" driven, this revealing a perception that staff development is not based on local needs. In short, these aspects of the delivery system seem to be quite episodic.

The most frequent activities consist of one-shot lectures given by non-local personnel with little follow-up subsequently provided for participants.

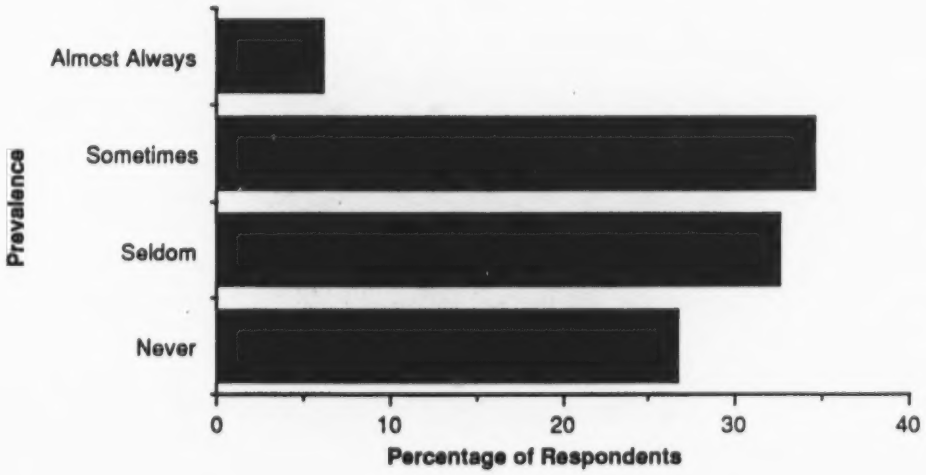
On the other hand, the survey also provides evidence of some systemic local staff development activities, or at the very least, a shared sense of local staff development efforts.

The respondents' shared sense of local staff development efforts are reflected in their responses to several questions. First, 30% of those surveyed reported that there were some district-provided, on-going activities that included training, implementation, and evaluation that spanned a year or more. This suggests that a significant minority of the respondent group perceive some systemic local effort at staff development. Second, when asked if staff development activities were part of a long-range plan for improving school programs, the vast majority responded "almost always" (44%) and "sometimes" (38%). This suggests that local educators believe that there is a larger plan into which specific staff development activities fit. Third, respondents generally felt that their opinions were considered in designating staff development needs—one third believed they "almost always" had a say on such matters and 45% percent believed they "sometimes" had a say. Clearly, many teachers and principals feel they are participating in the planning of staff development activities.

Respondents also seemed to share the perception that considerable cooperation and participation existed during local staff development activities. First, principals were perceived as very active in staff development. Sixty-one percent of the respondents said principals "almost always" participated in staff development activities along with the teachers, and an additional 26% said they "sometimes" participated. Second, respondents indicated strong community support for school activities, as less than 20% reported that the community "seldom" or "never" strongly supported school programs, teachers, and administrators. Third, respondents generally felt that teachers and administrators "almost always" (34%) or "sometimes" (39%) worked well together on these activities.

This general image of cooperation and shared participation in staff development activities apparently does not extend, however, to planned instructional cooperation among teachers. When asked if observations of others is ever a part of the staff development activities provided by the school district, only 29% responded affirmatively. In addition, when asked how much peer coaching was practiced, respondents portrayed much lower rates of cooperative activity. Exhibit 5 illustrates these views.

Exhibit 5: Prevalence of Peer Coaching in Staff Development



The responses to these two questions suggest that faculty exchanges of information and peer coaching are not usual components of staff development activities. Whatever systemic local efforts exist, these activities do not seem to include

encouraging teachers to share through planned release time or follow-up group activities. As indicated earlier, most follow-up activities were reported to be limited to questionnaires rather than continued, hands-on practice and direct exchanges between teachers. The presentations given by non-local staff developers do not seem to lead to other instructional improvement activities.

Since approximately one-third of the respondents did perceive systemic local staff development efforts, a mixed picture is presented. The overall picture tends to be similar to an episodic model of staff development organized around one-shot activities rather than a more comprehensive, systemic approach. It is important to remember, however, that one cannot easily characterize the region's staff development activities as exclusively episodic or systemic. These general models suggested in the literature are useful guides for capturing general tendencies, but one must be careful not to overlook the great diversity of activities in the region. While the data suggest strong tendencies towards episodic staff development, there are also signs of an emerging locally driven system as well. This development or potential will also be portrayed in subsequent sections.

While the data suggest strong tendencies towards episodic staff development, there are also signs of an emerging locally driven system as well.

One key factor that the reader must keep in mind about these results is the character of the sample: Recall that it contains (by design) a high proportion of principals (34%). A later section in this report explores the differences in perspective between teachers and principals. These data generally show that administrators responsible for directing local staff development activities tend to "see" or report more locally driven inservice activities than teachers do. In other words, the indicators of local staff development activities may be inflated due to the large percentage of principals in the sample. Taking this into account, there may be less tendency toward a systemic staff development model than the respondents seem to report. There are, of course, notable exceptions, and a more detailed look at this diversity will be presented in a subsequent section of this report.

The content of staff development activities. One goal of SEDL's survey and in-depth interviews was to explore and describe the type of staff development activities that were actually being conducted in the region. The regional survey, through an optional question, requested an open-ended description of a recent staff development experience. Almost half (48%) of the

respondent group responded, describing both the type of activity and their assessment of its utility. In addition, the in-depth discussions with 20 key informants reconstructed a five-year history of each one's involvement in staff development activities. Interviewers were able to elicit extensive reflections on these activities from the informants. Both the responses from the survey and the in-depth interviews were coded using the following general typology of inservice topics: (a) instructional and classroom management, (b) curriculum content areas, and (c) special enrichment/problem areas. Exhibit 6 provides a summary of the inservice activities reported.

Judging from the responses summarized in Exhibit 6, a diverse set of topics is being presented to the region's rural, small schools. Reported inservice activities clustered in the three defined areas, each with roughly one-third of the activity. Within the broad topical areas, certain specific topics were much more common than others. First, instructional and classroom management topics focused on discipline (21%), motivation (10%), critical thinking skills (10%), observing teaching (10%), lesson planning (7%), and a variety of other topics on handling children, testing, effective teaching, time-on-task, and classroom aides. Workshops and presentations in this area tended to be more practical, "hands on" types of activities. Most respondents viewed these type of activities positively, although such highly specific topics did not necessarily fit the needs of all teachers. As a result even these highly valued activities were sometimes criticized as either inappropriate for their special needs or too basic.

...a diverse set of topics is being presented to the region's rural, small schools.

Second, the curriculum content area focused on various workshops and presentations on writing (23%) and reading (21%). Other popular topics were local curriculum planning (17%); mathematics (10%); science (9%); bilingualism and different cultures (9%); application of the effective schools research (7%); and presentations on new textbooks, social studies, and literacy. This topic area was a mixture of practical how-to presentations and information on new materials and textbooks. Respondents were generally positive about these topic areas, but presentations by external providers apparently became "dated" very quickly. Respondents indicated a desire for the latest thing, so expectations for something different might have been quite high. It was suggested that outside presenters were frequently not familiar with what local staff had done, and therefore, it was difficult to gauge what the audience already knew or used in their daily teaching practices.

Exhibit 6
Most Recent Staff Development Experience Topics

Topic Area	From Survey N	From Survey %	From Interviews N	From Interviews %
Instruction and Curriculum Management	52	30	23	34
Discipline and Management	13	25	7	31
Teacher motivation and stress	6	12	5	23
Critical thinking skills	6	12	3	14
Observing/peer coaching skills	6	12	3	14
Lesson planning	4	8	1	2
Teaching materials	4	8	3	14
Handling students	4	8	1	2
Other	9	15	0	--
Curriculum Content	56	32	21	31
Writing	13	23	4	20
Reading	11	21	10	48
Local Planning	10	18	3	15
Mathematics	6	10	3	15
Science	5	9	1	2
Bilingual/other cultures	5	9	0	--
Effective schools research	4	7	0	--
Other	2	3	0	--
Special Enrichment and/or Problems	65	38	24	35
State laws and procedures	16	25	6	25
Special education	12	19	6	25
Youth problems	12	19	2	8
Computers	10	16	5	21
AIDS	6	9	5	21
Other	9	14	0	--
Totals	173	100	68	100

Third, the special enrichment/problem area covers a very diverse set of activities. Activities clustered around informational sessions designed to convey state policies and laws (24%), such as five year plans, teacher appraisal systems, new teacher education programs, and teacher rights. The other major topics were computer applications (15%) and special education (18%), the latter tending to focus on dyslexia. A number of other topics might generally be classified as "youth problems" (15%), these covering issues of drugs, teenage suicides, "high risk students," and the emotionally disturbed. Another timely social problem topic receiving some attention was AIDS (7%). The rest of the activity ranged from presentations on wildlife, sex education, and formal negotiations to "education in the 21st century." Respondents seemed to have more mixed views of this general topic area. Most commented favorably on presentations on computers, social problems topics, and youth. They were generally more negative about presentations dealing with state educational policies and special education. Information concerning the latter topics is apparently more redundant or not as immediately relevant. The more controversial topics like drugs, AIDS, and computers apparently fill gaps in the respondents' personal experience for dealing with youth and new technologies. One topic area with limited activity was the problems of minority students or the "culturally different"—these may have been active topics in earlier years, but they have become less so in recent years.

...75% of staff development activities were conducted by outsiders.

The responses to the open-ended survey questions suggest that 75% of staff development activities were conducted by outsiders. This corroborates the data previously presented in Exhibit 3: When directly asked who usually conducts staff development activities, the survey respondents identified regional, state, and other non-local providers most frequently (71%). Further, in the majority of cases, respondents indicated that these providers delivered their staff development activities at local sites. The more qualitative data from open-ended responses and informants suggest an increasing practice of teachers attending staff development outside their district. A number of informants indicated a growing trend of schools giving staff release time to attend workshops at regional education service centers or regional educational cooperatives. Regrettably, the survey was not able to quantify the extent of this trend, which undoubtedly coincides with the growth of regional service centers in some states. The more in-depth reports of informants suggest, however, that most school districts still do not allow considerable choice or release time.

Many respondents reported not being able to substitute outside workshops, wherever they might be held, for locally sponsored staff development activities.

Moreover, one major theme in the comments is that local staff development offerings are not specialized and flexible enough to serve the variety of needs participants have. The following comments express these perceptions quite well:

"Our last staff development workshop, like so many, was watered down and covered a broad area to meet the needs of a large group. Because of finances, we can't offer a variety of topics, and so after many years of experience in teaching, these things can be a boring, mundane task to attend."

"I spent three days writing poetry, limericks, paragraphs, and comparisons. That was all very interesting, but none of it has proven useful in my subject area, Math 7-12."

"Staff development should be a learning experience for teachers. Subject areas should not be the same for a trig teacher as for a kindergarten teacher. Our needs are vastly different."

...inservice tries to be all things to all people, and thus disappoints a number of these busy, practical people...

Reading hundreds of open-ended comments about staff development topics leaves one with the image of a giant smorgasbord. A great diversity of topics is being presented in the rural, small schools of the region. As previously indicated, most respondents were positive about their inservice activities. Teachers and principals generally seemed to like inservice programs with great topical diversity. A problem arises, however, over targeting specific resource people for those people who need the relevant information the most. As the earlier comments make clear, inservice tries to be all things to all people, and thus disappoints a number of these busy, practical people, each of whom has unique problems and preoccupations. Respondents made both positive and negative comments about a wide variety of topics. Apparently, many different types of topics will be accepted as relevant, if presented well.

Moreover, it does not seem to matter who—insiders or outsiders, university professors or book salesmen—presents the material. Respondents were both positive and critical of all different types of presenters. No one type of presenter seemed to have an inherent advantage over others. Some respondents extolled the virtues of college-level courses and professor-experts. Others talked about professor types as if they were inherently incapable of thinking and presenting useful, relevant materials. The same diverse views emerged about curriculum experts and fellow teachers as presenters.

Lastly, these data also suggest that the mandated character of staff development activities has become an issue. A strong minority of the respondents portrayed the state educational leaders and experts as imposing upon and interfering with their staff development activities:

"Our state requires a minimum of five days of staff development, which is too many in my opinion. Most have been presented by a co-op, and only half of mine have been excellent."

"Staff development should provide the teacher with the opportunity to enrich his or her educational experience so in turn they can stimulate other young lives of the future. So many times, however, it is a task just to obtain points or meet state requirements and the paperwork of the bureaucrats."

"Most of us consider this [staff development] paper work we do to provide jobs for the state people. Very seldom is there sufficient follow-through to merit the scores of hours we put in on this."

"A necessary evil required by the state."

...the mandated character of staff development activities has become an issue.

These types of comments suggest what a number of the informants underscored. There is a perception among respondents that the state mandated staff development activities, which require days or points, "over bureaucratizes" the process of delivering inservice training. The main theme in these criticisms is that inservice activities are increasingly inflexible because they are state mandated. According to the respondents, this leads to less choice and to more unrealistic content selection in the staff development offerings. The following comments echo this problem:

"My last staff development was terrible. The consultant was new to our regional service center and was not aware of the work we had already done in this particular area. The superintendent was also unaware of what we had done, or what the consultant's presentation would contain."

"The teacher conference training program was taught by a staff member from a state university. It was very elementary—not a quality program—although the consultant was a kind person. The program was of little or no value to a highly professional teacher—yet the program was probably very expensive."

"We spent eight hours playing with blocks to learn six teaching techniques for math. They could have simply handed us the block kit and directions."

"We did have one on computers, but it was a real flop. It was on basics, not usage. I have a computer at home, but learned nothing about it from this."

Not infrequently, respondents complained about the mismatch between topics and needs, and the inappropriate level of the presentation. At times, important topics were apparently presented at too low or too high a level for the audience. At times, a topic was apparently repeated over and over. Special education and dyslexia received the most criticism as an overdone topic. In addition, it is not clear what constitutes a "relevant" topic. For example, a number of respondents expressed enthusiasm for "timely topics" such as AIDS or drug abuse. These appear to be informative and entertaining topics. Presentations by law officers and nurses were praised for their "frontline," first-hand perspectives. Even a topic as mundane as state teacher retirement policies can be "very entertaining from the standpoint of removing stress."

As indicated, however, those topics that purport to offer immediately applicable techniques or information were usually considered more relevant. The following comments illustrate the most basic criteria that respondents typically use for judging a topic relevant:

...topics that purport to offer immediately applicable techniques or information were usually considered more relevant.

"I attended a workshop on 'story telling.' It did have an impact. Story telling is really a skill to be learned. Anybody can read or tell a story, but to really tell a good story requires good reading and telling skills. And you develop the skill and you use it over the years once you've learned it."

"I attended a workshop for elementary teachers concerning the use of maps and globes in the classroom. Materials, games, and activities were presented—all were beneficial to me—I have used them this year in my class."

"Yesterday I was given a professional leave day to visit three other kindergarten programs. The day was very productive. We plan to implement a math program we saw."

"A math workshop put on by a graduate student working on her doctorate. She had grant money and had developed a complete program for use in grades K-3. She furnished all materials necessary to teach the program. It was wonderful, not what we usually have though."

Those topics that are presented with immediately useful materials, or specific, directly applicable skills were invariably considered more relevant. Timely information and conceptually complex topics were also considered relevant, but usable things like maps and globes or a complete math curriculum seemed to be preferred. For example, when "storytelling" is presented as a "teaching skill," it becomes useful, and therefore makes pedagogical sense. The myriad of focused workshops on

instructional and curricular problems and materials seem more attuned to the general expectations of teachers. Such topics only fail when they are out-of-step with local needs and practices. As indicated previously, outside speakers may often be "flying in the dark" and misjudge the level and needs of their audience.

Teachers also seem to respond to new controversial social problems and people-oriented topics such as stress, motivation, drug abuse, and AIDS. Topics that are inspirational, motivational, and hopeful are likely to be as well received as those that are highly specific, technical, and practical. The more detailed comments of respondents suggest a useful distinction, therefore, between (a) the timely and entertaining and (b) the practical. Their criteria for a good staff development topic and presentation include both of these dimensions.

What actually happens in staff development is a rather ad hoc process...

Characterizing the actual topical content of on-going staff development activity is difficult because it is so varied. These programs appear to be the outgrowth of a loosely defined relationship between local and state educational agencies. What actually happens in staff development is a rather ad hoc process; program selections depend on the initiative of individuals at all organizational levels of the state public school system. There may often be no coherent, planned sequence of content. Moreover, what gets selected for presentation may be increasingly determined at the regional or state level.

The next section explores in greater depth the respondents' diverse views of, and preferences for, staff development. It presents what the responding sample of rural educators' stated they wanted in a staff development delivery system—its purpose, content, and leadership.

Local educators' preferences for staff development. A variety of different types of data on rural educators' views of the best system for the delivery of staff development was collected. The regional survey contained several relevant multiple-choice questions and two pertinent open-ended questions. In addition, interviewers engaged the 20 informants in an extensive discussion of the type of staff development system that would best meet their needs.

Respondents to the regional survey, through an optional question, were asked to define staff development (and 43% did

so). The vast majority of respondents defined staff development as personal self-improvement; a minority of respondents presented rationales for staff development that stressed school-wide improvement. (As noted earlier, the latter is a key component of the systemic approach to staff development.) Several comments stood out as broader, more collective conceptions of staff development:

> "I would define staff development as what the words imply...development of the staff to achieve the purpose of the school district's philosophy of education. It is my opinion that we have no clear philosophy or goals—no innovation, no creative approaches. Teachers are isolated and are now cramped by curriculum and the time frames that squelch creativity. Teachers are tired and burned out. I think staff development ought to address these needs."

> "It is much more than inservice; it is more of a personal get together, because we are a small school. We meet with teachers from other districts, and students from here to get new ideas."

> "I feel it is not only inservice but an on-going process. Teachers help teachers develop as well as staff leaders such as principals and others."

The survey also asked rural educators to indicate the type of structure that would best provide for their staff development needs, asking the respondent to select between programs planned and implemented by local personnel (school or school district), regional or state agencies, experts from private consulting firms, university courses, or peer coaching. Exhibit 7 provides a summary of their responses.

Exhibit 7: Preferred Providers of Staff Development

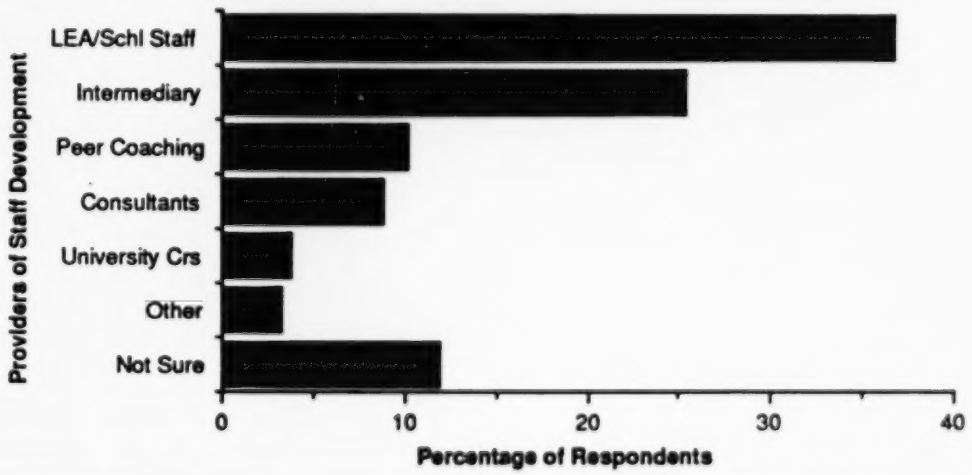


Exhibit 7 shows that, when forced to choose, a large minority (37%) of the respondents preferred a local school or school district-run program over all other choices. Another substantial portion of the sample (25%) preferred programs planned and implemented by intermediaries (e.g., regional teacher centers, regional education agencies, and state education agencies). These results stand in contrast to Exhibit 3, which displays the respondents' perceptions of who actually conducts staff development. A much smaller percentage (18%) of the respondents reported that their local districts were involved in locally run staff development activities. Moreover, most respondents (68%) indicated that their districts were providing staff development in the form of one-shot lectures provided by outsiders.

This desire for a more systemic approach is expressed even more forcefully in the in-depth interviews. One recurring theme in a number of the comments was the perception that a local approach was both needed and effective. The following comments optimistically express this view in the respondents' own words:

...a large minority (37%) of the respondents preferred a local school or school district-run program over all other choices.

"Our most recent staff development concerned 'alignment,' being sure what is taught and what is tested. This was conducted by the superintendent and included special education. Within the next six weeks we will be conducted by the 'father' of mastery learning. Local staff development has been an on-going process at our school the last four years. Most of it has been done with staff concerning their 'delivery system.'"

"We are currently holding monthly meetings centering around the book Creating Effective Schools. Each time a teacher or administrator presents a lesson, we discuss the material and the feasibility, or need in our school. We try to limit to one hour, but we get so excited it becomes difficult not to stay longer. It is a good idea, and we have already seen implementation of some of the ideas coming from these meetings."

"Staff development has improved very much in the past few years. Staff members have input into the programs, which helps us feel better about participating."

"Our school board has done a good job in helping us improve the total school picture. We have extra incentives for staff development, because we were also chosen by the state as a 'model school.' We concentrate on the team approach to teaching. The whole school is involved in changing the school. We help each other improve."

One informant described in great detail an example of the planning, cooperation, and continuing focus that are hallmarks of the systemic approach to staff development. In this particular case, the strong leadership of the principal was cited as a prime force behind the approach. The teacher described staff development activities in her school with great enthusiasm:

"The unit meets every day for an hour, and we continually are doing staff development. ...[The principal] provides us the direction, and we follow up. In the case of implementing the new assertive discipline system, all the unit leaders worked together separately and often as their own group. We had to develop a reward system and specify what would happen to a child who misbehaves. The children changed. The teachers changed. Everything went for the better. We had great cooperation from the principal and the parents, too."

This teacher went on to describe the way that other new programs had been instituted. In each example of inservice implementation, the "unit" clearly had administrative support, release time for inservice, considerable group process, high teacher participation, and a great deal of flexibility. The initiative was primarily on the local level, and they exercisedgreater control over what outside resource people did. This teacher expressed considerable enthusiasm, and at least in this case, local autonomy was apparently motivating the staff to change.

There was a strong flavor of compliance rather than aggressive, enthusiastic support for staff development programs.

Illustrating this interest in and potential for locally-driven staff development is not to argue, however, that most rural educators are anxious to change the present system. When asked if colleagues in their school expressed concern about limited staff development, the majority replied "seldom" (42%) and "never" (15%).

Moreover, as indicated in the responses to open-ended questions on specific staff development activities, the majority (60%) of activities were rated positively. The typical attitude expressed in all the open-ended responses was matter-of-fact and mildly positive in tone. There was a strong flavor of compliance rather than aggressive, enthusiastic support for staff development programs. The majority of respondents seemed to passively accept their staff development activities.

In contrast, the interviewees, who may be model teachers, tended to express more enthusiasm about staff development. A significant minority of those surveyed also portrayed themselves as more committed, change-oriented professionals. Their discussions of local staff development, like those of the informants, conveyed reform-minded attitudes.

Finally, a very vocal, substantial minority expressed very negative comments about all staff development. When specifically asked, 21% of the survey respondent group indicated that they "got nothing out of staff development programs." An almost identical percentage (23%) expressed open-ended comments that

were quite negative in tone. The following are some examples of these strongly rhetorical bombasts against all staff development:

> "All staff development experiences I have ever had consisted, in my judgment, of educators' smoke-signalling, blowing smoke about irrelevant issues. I would like to work with and imitate people who have a record of making learning happening."

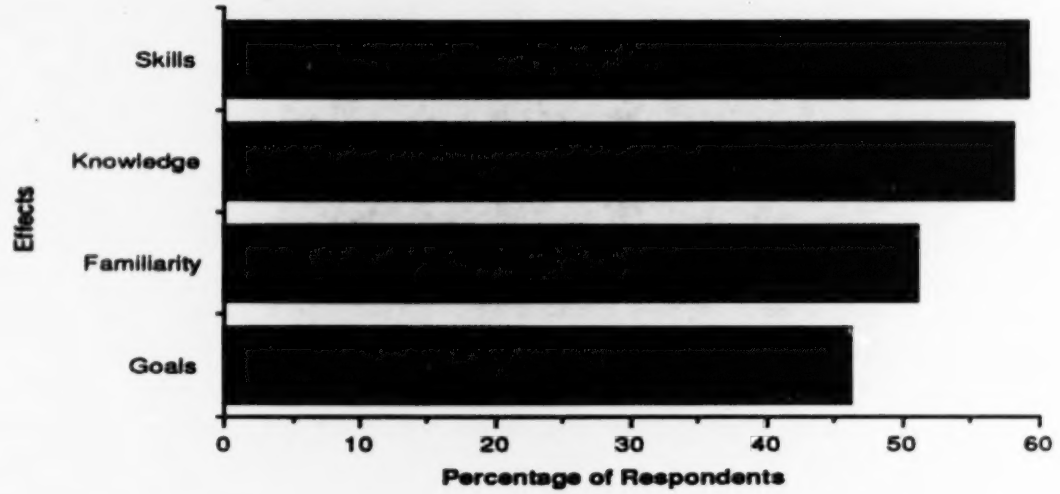
> "State sent personnel are the pits. Talking about not being able to find your 'cubbyhole' in the 'maze' at [the state education agency] is not very enlightening. Neither is reading a report to us. These people are typical 'can't do' people."

> "I usually go away feeling as though my time was wasted. I very seldom gain anything. It is a rare occasion that I am glad I went. Staff development is boring, boring."

Why a relatively large minority of the respondents appears to be strongly against inservice activities is not altogether clear from these data. Various comments indicate that some of the older, established rural educators had become "turned-off" with any attempts to change the status quo. However, understanding the reasons behind these highly critical responses would require a much more focused inquiry into the personal motivations and experiences of the respondents.

Another important dimension of attitude and practice surveyed was what effect staff development had on individuals and staff unity and cooperation. Exhibit 8 provides a summary of the generally positive perspective rural educators had of the lasting effects of staff development activities.

Exhibit 8: Perceived Effects of Staff Development

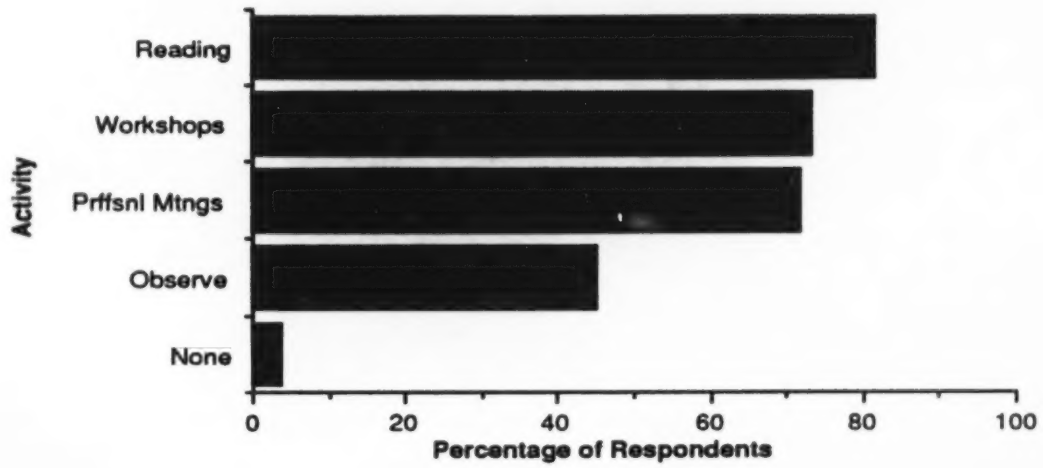


Judging from the responses in Exhibit 8, most respondents (59%) felt that staff development activities had helped them to improve their classroom skills. Almost an equal number (58%) felt they had gained more facts and knowledge. These results generally suggest a strong perception that staff development helps educators improve as individual professionals. This is particularly true in terms of specific, new information, concepts, and skills.

Respondents are less sure, however, that these experiences leave them with a new understanding of their districts' long-range plans and goals. More than half (54%) of the respondents felt that staff development did not give them a better sense of where their district was headed through their inservice efforts to change. Further, almost half of those surveyed (49%) did not feel that staff development activities increased their understanding of what other teachers and principals were doing. This suggests that rural educators perceive these programs more for individual self-improvement than for school-wide improvement. The interviews with informants strongly corroborate these findings.

The idea of staff development as primarily self-improvement can also be seen in the respondents' reports of their private professional self-development practices. Exhibit 9 describes the activities they reported pursuing on their own.

Exhibit 9: Personal Professional Development Activities



Several interesting profiles emerge from the respondents' descriptions of their personal professional development activities. First, a very high percentage (82%) reported that they read professional books and journals. In addition, the vast majority participated in workshops or university courses (73%) and/or attended professional meetings (72%). The general picture that emerges is of a group that actively tries to improve itself professionally. The survey results do not allow us to say unequivocally that such high levels of self-improvement are entirely self-motivated. The recently implemented state reforms that require and reward professional development may partially account for these high levels of self-improvement activity. In the in-depth interviews, informants generally explained that the new mandates, although too doctrinaire, did force teachers to upgrade themselves. Whatever the reasons, most respondents appeared to be involved in their own professional development.

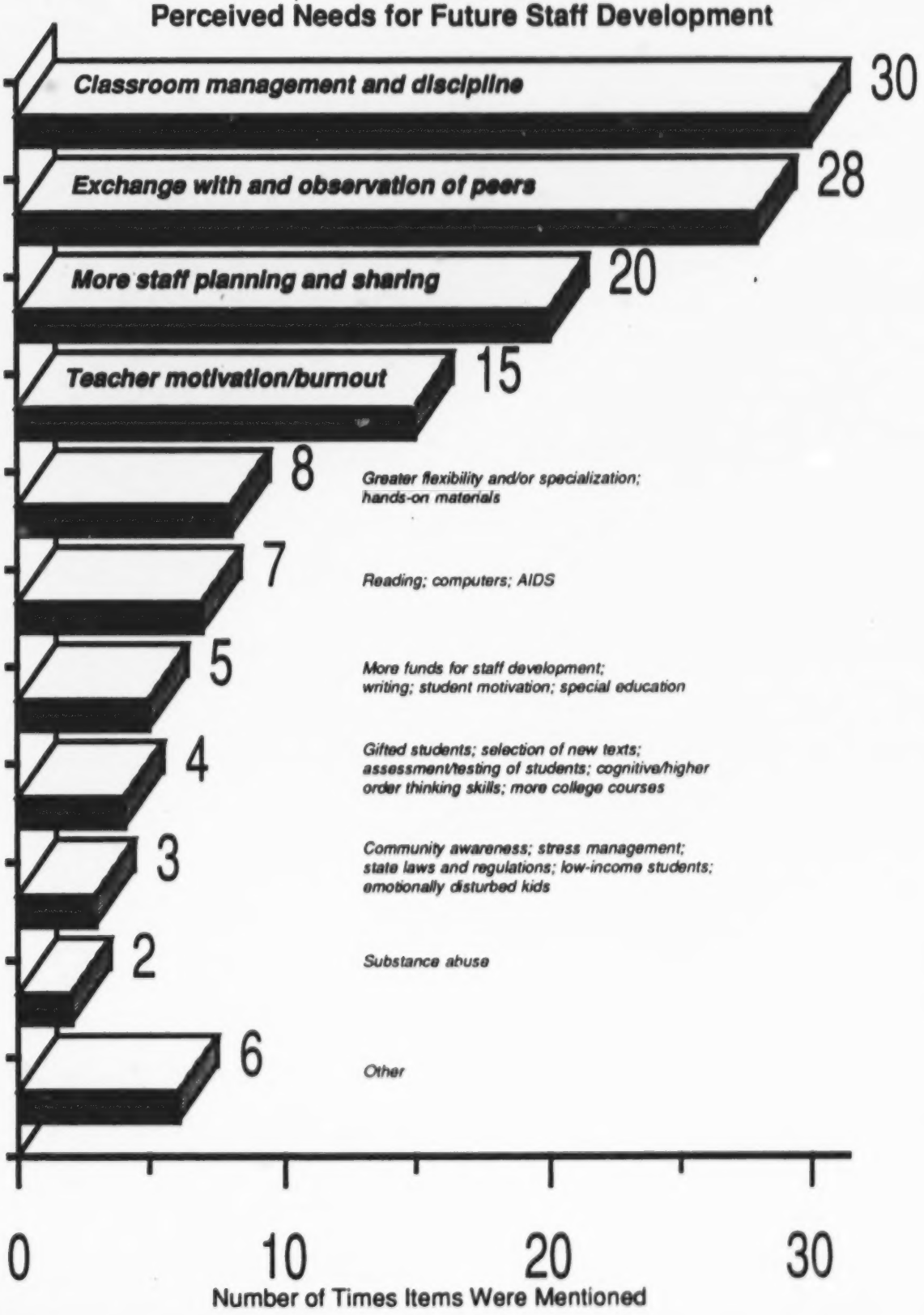
The general picture that emerges is of a group that actively tries to improve itself professionally.

In addition, a significant percentage (45%) of the respondents indicated that they were taking the initiative to observe their fellow teachers. The earlier portrayal of staff development provided by the school or school district emphasized one-shot activities and little peer coaching. Nevertheless, a number of teachers appear to be seeking more peer contact and peer coaching, even though staff development programs may not be promoting it. Only 29% of the respondents reported that their staff development programs encouraged peer contact. Moreover, the open-ended comments and discussions with the informants were frequently critical of the lack of follow-up and release time for peer coaching. In short, many respondents seemed to believe that staff development should lead to more peer sharing and greater staff unity. If staff development does not lead to more peer interchange, almost half of the respondents apparently seek these kinds of experiences on their own. This theme was also very clear in the open-ended comments.

Respondents were asked directly to describe what they would like and need in future staff development programs. This question generated a wide range of interesting responses that were difficult to quantify. What follows is a summary of the major themes.

Exhibit 10 indicates that topics focused on classroom management were mentioned most frequently. The more in-depth interviews explored this interest more carefully. The informants consistently expressed the desire for inservice that would make them better classroom teachers. For them that includes many

Exhibit 10
Perceived Needs for Future Staff Development



components—motivation, specific pedagogical skills, new curriculum content, human relations skills with children and parents, and above all, classroom management and discipline techniques. They acknowledge that inservice is already focused on these areas, and they want more of the same.

The other major theme worth noting in the open-ended responses is the felt need for more peer exchanges and observations (28 responses) and more staff planning and sharing (20 responses). Both of these felt needs actually point in the same direction. Respondents hope for a more active, united local effort that gets staff involved and working together and motivating each other (15 responses). The informants also generally expressed a need for long-term staff development programs, but the majority rated their local schools as unsuccessful at implementing on-going, long-range programs.

The following comments will give the reader the flavor of the respondents' feelings on these major themes of local planning, building unity, peer sharing, motivation, and flexible, diverse offerings. These comments represent the most articulate and thoughtful expressions on these themes:

Respondents hope for a more active, united local effort that gets staff involved and working together and motivating each other...

On local planning:

"We need a plan that would provide for a focus toward some common general need as well as being able to be specific so as to provide for individual needs. Focusing on one or two needs that are common for all classroom teachers for a period of one year and build from there so a cycle is created would be one idea. However, a broad range of needs will exist at the same time and these could be provided for by way of video, cassettes, or short evening workshops."

"I would like to see staff development activities throughout the year for all grades, K-6. I would like to have speakers to boost the staff morale and would help us deal with problems children have today. This will require much more local planning than we do."

"I would like to see our school go back to the faculty meetings where we discussed local problems.... There is never time for us to get together for sharing and planning."

On building unity:

"We need programs on interpersonal communication to help mesh the various groups within the staff—to help bring in the individuals who interact little with others—to help lessen isolation of individual staff members and lessen tensions."

"I would like to see 'meetings of the minds' in subject areas to include teachers in specific subjects with one or more experts in teaching that subject."

"I would like to work with other teachers in small groups (up to 12-20). I would want outside consultants, experts in the field to bring in fresh ideas and suggestions. I would also like to see our administrators chosen because they are instructional leaders and experts—not because they are good old boys and ex-coaches. We need a unified approach."

The people behind these words come across as thoughtful, dedicated professionals.

On peer sharing:

"I would like to be able to take a professional day off to observe model teachers in my district in a 'routine day' periodically as a means to freshen my own teaching techniques."

"I think our district has a great SD program. A new component I especially like is the Mentor Teacher program. This is where teachers who have been with the district for a few years are specially trained to work with new teachers to our district. The teachers participating in this program this year are receiving three hours of graduate credit."

"I would like the opportunity to visit other school systems to observe experienced teachers in my field. I also think I would benefit by having this as a professionally planned and implemented staff development program."

On motivating staff:

"More classes for teachers' morale building, building self-esteem for teachers. Too many teachers I know are 'burned up' and 'burned out' with education right now.

Our kids need for teachers to be happy with what they're doing, not feel helpless and hopeless about what is happening in education. Reading, writing, and arithmetic aren't what we need to know more about right now."

"We need something to get rid of the negative attitude displayed by the teachers here. Many of them spend too much time sitting in the lounge running down the kids, administrators, etc. They let this run off onto the students which creates apathy."

"Motivation is the critical element. When I am motivated to improve myself and keep on top of content it motivates my students.... We'd probably get more out of staff development, but there is so much resentment on the part of all our teachers. I mean, they expect us to stay after school for staff development. Why can't it be done during school hours?"

The people behind these words come across as thoughtful, dedicated professionals

On more flexible staff development offerings:

"Hey! ask any teacher here and each needs something special. Our main needs are math and writing. My main need is using computers to improve science and using computers in biology to get away from dissection."

"I enjoy our summer staff development options. Our area teacher center presents maybe 100 different workshops from which we can choose what would be the most beneficial to us. I like this approach to staff development. I like being able to choose what I want to attend—not whatever my supervisor might choose."

"We need specialized workshops aimed at a very specific group. Large group workshops are not giving us things we need to use in our individual programs."

In many ways these respondents eloquently speak for themselves. Their voices do not require extensive interpretation. The people behind these words come across as thoughtful, dedicated professionals. They appear ready to roll up their sleeves and work together to create a better staff development program. They are critical, but in a positive and constructive manner. Their basic common sense asks for such

things as release time to observe colleagues, no after school hours meetings, planning a common curriculum, leaders who are experts, and people talking and sharing. None of their recommendations for improving staff development are particularly unique or new, but they do suggest a number of very basic organizational features that a local staff development delivery system needs to function effectively.

Differences between principals and teachers. One final set of data that reveals some interesting differences is a comparison of the responses of principals to those of teachers. Both groups shared the same basic views, but principals tended to be more positive about staff development activities than teachers. For example, only 10% of the principals agreed with the strong statement that they "got nothing out of staff development." In contrast, 27% of the teachers agreed to this negative assessment of staff development.

...principals tended to be more positive about staff development activities than teachers.

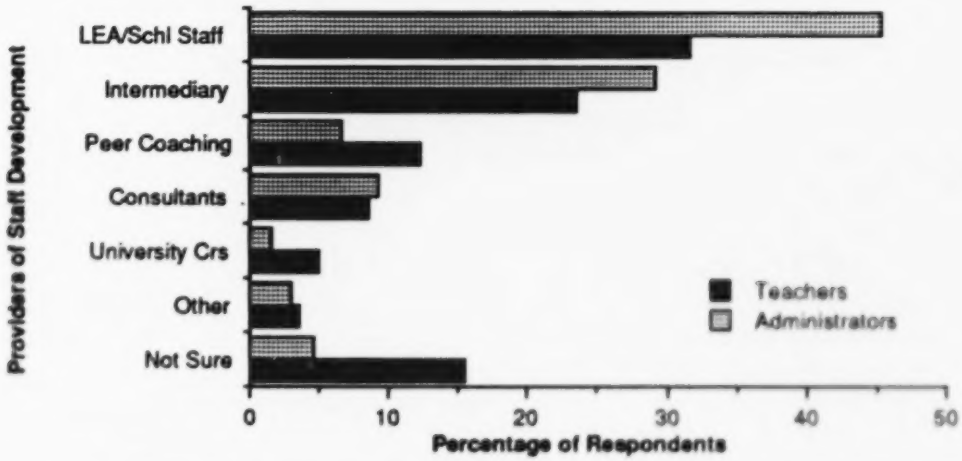
In addition, principals perceived more on-going staff development activity than did teachers. Just under half (44%) of the principals reported that their school districts had provided on-going staff development activities that included training, implementation, and evaluation for a year or more. Only 29% of the teachers had this image of their local inservice training activities. The other side of this perception is the respondents' characterization of staff development as one-shot lectures. Teachers reported much more often than principals did (38% versus 18%) that staff development "almost always" consisted of one-shot lectures. In addition, principals were more likely than teachers (55% versus 38%) to claim that staff development activities were "almost always" a part of a long-range plan.

The principals' view of staff development as more systemic is also reflected in a variety of other questions. First, principals said that state mandates "almost always" determined staff development activities far less than teachers did (19% versus 37%). This suggests that principals think staff development arises more from local initiatives. Closely related to this view was the contrast between the principals and teachers (8% versus 31%) that local educators "seldom" or "never" designated staff development needs. Both of these responses further support the notion that principals tend to see staff development as a local affair more than teachers do.

When asked to identify the best system for providing staff development, respondents also differed, as displayed in Exhibit

11. Once again, the principals showed a preference for locally planned and implemented programs (46% versus 32%), though more teachers (16% versus 5%) indicated they were not sure what the best staff development system was. Principals also favored regional teacher service centers as preferred providers somewhat more than teachers (29% versus 23%) did.

Exhibit 11: Preferred Providers of Staff Development: Teachers vs Administrators

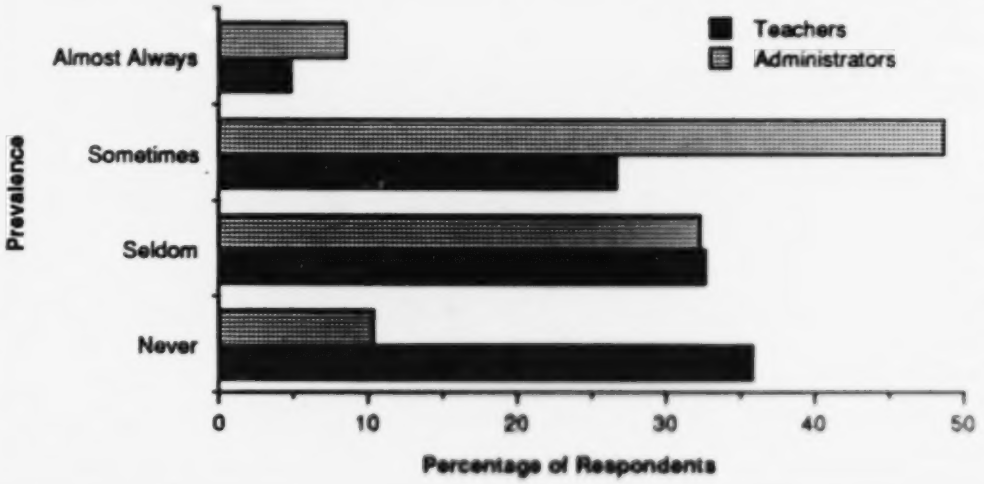


This pattern of seeing staff development as a local, systemic activity can also be seen in the respondents' more qualitative descriptions of their staff development experiences. For example, principals were much more likely to claim (46% versus 28%) that teachers and administrators "almost always" worked together on staff development. Principals also reported more frequently (76% versus 53%) than teachers that principals "almost always" participated in staff development activities along with their teachers. Principals, more than teachers, also tended to see the community "almost always" strongly supporting school programs (46% versus 34%). Lastly, principals were more likely than teachers (50% versus 37%) to think that staff development activities were "almost always" evaluated. In short, one gets a more positive picture of a functioning, harmonious staff development system from principals than from teachers.

Even more important measures of a local staff development system's unity, flexibility, and open character are peer observations and peer coaching. Principals reported that peer observation was employed as a staff development activity substantially more often than did teachers (60% versus 37%). In

addition, Exhibit 12 shows that principals perceived much more peer coaching occurring under staff development than did teachers.

Exhibit 12: Prevalence of Peer Coaching as Seen by Teachers vs Administrators



These differences between principals and teachers on peer observation and coaching practices may mark the major divergence in their views. The open-ended responses reported in the previous section underscored how important these practices were to many teachers. This suggests a major area of attitudinal differences between principals and teachers. Why do approximately 25% more principals perceive more peer observation and coaching than teachers do? Is this a sign of wishful thinking on the part of principals? Or is this some kind of oversight of a basic limitation in their local staff delivery systems? Whatever the reasons for this difference, it must be remembered that principals did report favoring locally driven staff development systems (see Exhibit 11).

Finally, principals also expressed much more sanguine views on the effects of staff development programs. First, principals reported more frequently than teachers (65% versus 43%) that staff development activities "increased familiarity with others." Second, principals also believed more strongly than teachers (50% versus 39%) that staff development activities left their participants with a "better sense of the long-range plans and goals" of the school or district. Third, principals perceived more often than teachers (73% versus 50%) that participants in staff development gained "more facts and knowledge." Overall,

therefore, principals appeared more satisfied with the effects and gains from staff development programs than did teachers.

Conclusions

The regional survey of rural educators, coupled with the interviews conducted with selected teachers from rural, small schools, has pointed out a number of tendencies in the region to follow what has been described as an episodic model of staff development. The majority of respondents do not call their staff development delivery system episodic, but they are critical of their system for largely providing one-shot lectures presented by non-local personnel with little follow-up provided for participants. The current delivery system is capable of providing information on a variety of topics, however, the selection of specific topics does not seem to be based on local planning. In short, the delivery system for staff development activities seems to lack a long-range plan. Many respondents are critical of these practices in the same manner that experts in the field are.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents surveyed seem mildly satisfied with and compliant towards present staff development activities. Two strong minority views, one enthusiastically positive and one strongly negative, also exist. The enthusiastically positive respondents would appear to be calling for the establishment of a locally planned and implemented, staff development system. In their system, there would be much more of a collective approach. Local staff development groups would be formed to plan and carry out workshops and activities. They would stress hands-on activities for new curriculum development, classroom management techniques, and a wide range of topics. They would also increase the use of peer coaching and emphasize long-term follow-up. In short, at least a strong minority of respondents seem to be advocating a more systemic approach to staff development.

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Appendix A:
Staff Development Questionnaire

STAFF DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire asks many questions about staff development. For this questionnaire, assume that "staff development" is anything your school or district plans or helps you arrange to assist you in becoming a better educator. This includes inservice training. At the end of the questionnaire, you have a chance to explain what *you* think staff development should be.

When you complete the questionnaire, mail it in the postage-paid envelope. You do not have to provide your name or the name of your school on the envelope or the questionnaire.

Please answer as many of the questions below as you can. Thank you very much for your help.

Questions 1 through 8 relate to staff development experiences throughout your career.

1. How frequently do you have a chance to participate in staff development activities sponsored by the school district?
   - ☐ About once each school year
   - ☐ About twice each school year
   - ☐ More than twice during the school year
   - ☐ In the summer only
   - ☐ My school district does not sponsor staff development
   - ☐ Other _____

2. Who usually conducts the staff development activity sponsored by the school or school district?
   - ☐ Regional education agency or teacher center staff
   - ☐ State education agency staff
   - ☐ A professional association
   - ☐ Local school district staff
   - ☐ Staff from my school
   - ☐ An outside consultant
   - ☐ A media presentation (video, film, etc.)
   - ☐ I have not had any recent staff development activities
   - ☐ Other _____

3. What kinds of staff development does your present school district provide? Consider future staff development plans as well as past experiences. MARK AS MANY AS APPLY.
   - ☐ Leader-facilitated discussion
   - ☐ Scheduled observations of another teacher or administrator
   - ☐ One-time lectures or talks by staff development experts
   - ☐ University coursework
   - ☐ Community service courses from a local high school or vocational center
   - ☐ Hands-on workshops lasting a half-day or more
   - ☐ On-going activities that include training, implementation, and evaluation for a year or more
   - ☐ Faculty meetings at the beginning of the school year
   - ☐ Interactive computer course work
   - ☐ My district does not provide staff development
   - ☐ Other _____

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Questions 1 through 8 relate to staff development experiences throughout your career.

4. In general, what do you get out of the school district sponsored staff development programs you've attended? MARK AS MANY AS APPLY.
   - ☐ More familiarity with what other teachers or principals are doing
   - ☐ Improved skills or ideas I can use in the classroom
   - ☐ More facts and knowledge
   - ☐ A better sense of the long-range plans and goals of my school or district
   - ☐ I don't get very much out of staff development programs
   - ☐ I have never participated in a staff development program
   - ☐ Other _____

5. From your point of view, which of the following is the best system or structure for providing staff development?
   - ☐ Programs planned and implemented by local school or district personnel
   - ☐ Programs planned and implemented by teacher centers, regional or state education agencies
   - ☐ Programs planned and implemented by experts from consulting firms and research organizations
   - ☐ University courses
   - ☐ Teachers and administrators helping, coaching, and training other teachers
   - ☐ I am not sure what is best
   - ☐ Other _____

6. Where are most school or school district sponsored staff development activities held?
   - ☐ At the school building
   - ☐ At another school in the district or at the district office
   - ☐ At a regional agency or teacher center
   - ☐ At a nearby college or university
   - ☐ Professionals in my school do not attend staff development programs
   - ☐ Other _____

7. In your school district, what usually happens after a staff development activity? MARK AS MANY AS APPLY.
   - ☐ We fill out a questionnaire at the end of the session
   - ☐ Participants get together at some later time to review what was learned
   - ☐ Participants are observed or students are tested
   - ☐ My school district does not offer staff development
   - ☐ Other _____

8. What do you do on your own (in addition to what the school district plans) to develop your professional capabilities? MARK AS MANY AS APPLY.
   - ☐ Observe other teachers or school staff
   - ☐ Take college or university courses or summer workshops
   - ☐ Read books and professional journals
   - ☐ Attend meetings of professional groups
   - ☐ I am not able at this time to do much professional development on my own
   - ☐ Other _____

Here are some statements about staff development activities. Beside each statement are words that describe how often the activity occurs in your school. Circle the choice that best describes the frequency of each activity *at your school.*

9. Teachers and administrators work together to plan staff development.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
10. Staff development activities are part of a long-range plan for improving school programs.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
11. Educators designate the type of staff development they need.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
12. The principal participates in staff development along with the teachers.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER

13. The school evaluates staff development activities.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
14. Peer coaching is part of staff development.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
15. The only staff development my school has is what state mandates require.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
16. The community strongly supports school programs, teachers, and administrators.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
17. Staff development consists of "one shot" lectures or presentations.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
18. Teachers in my school express concern about limited staff development.	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER

In questions 19 through 23 tell us something about yourself and your school..

19. How many years have you been a teacher or an administrator?
    - ☐ This is my first year
    - ☐ 1 - 3 years
    - ☐ 4 - 7 years
    - ☐ 8 - 12 years
    - ☐ 13 - 18 years
    - ☐ more than 18 years

20. About how many students attend the school you work in now? If you work in more than one school, select the number in the *largest* school.
    - ☐ Fewer than 50 students
    - ☐ 50-149 students
    - ☐ 150-299 students
    - ☐ 300-499 students
    - ☐ 500-999 students
    - ☐ more than 1000 students

21. Which of the following describes your current job?
    - ☐ I teach kindergarten or elementary school students
    - ☐ I teach grades 7 or 8
    - ☐ I teach high school students
    - ☐ I am a principal or an assistant principal
    - ☐ I work at more than one of these levels
    - ☐ Other _____

22. In what kind of geographical area do you work? Select the item that *you* think best describes it.
    - ☐ Rural area
    - ☐ Suburban area
    - ☐ Urban area
    - ☐ Other _____

23. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
    - ☐ Masters degree or doctorate
    - ☐ Bachelors degree plus some graduate courses
    - ☐ Bachelors degree
    - ☐ Some college courses
    - ☐ Other _____

These questions are optional. If you need more space, continue your comments on another piece of paper.

Describe your most recent staff development experience. Include your opinion of the experience. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

This questionnaire assumes that staff development is inservice education and anything else your school or district does to help you become a better educator. How would *you* define staff development? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Assume that you will be working at your current school for at least two more years. Describe what you need or would like to have in a staff development program.

_____

_____

_____

_____